RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

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CANADIAN HOME INSPECTORS AND BUILDING OFFICIALS NATIONAL INITIATIVE PHASE TWO: DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL CERTIFICATION AND ACCREDITATION MODELS

BACKGROUND

The Canadian home and building inspection industry consists of home/property inspectors (HPI), who provide inspection services primarily to existing residential buildings; municipal building officials (MBO), who are responsible for monitoring new construction and minimum levels of health, fire and life safety under building codes and related bylaws; and First Nations Building Officers (FNBO), who provide residential, commercial and institutional construction and renovation technical services (i.e., plans review, inspections, recommendations for repairs, technical advocacy and advisory role) mainly for buildings located in First Nation/Aboriginal communities.

In the 1990s, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) research indicated that the private inspection industry was very fragmented, comprised of a number of private inspection associations, organizations, franchises and firms across the country, each with different inspection standards and levels of qualifications. There was also considerable variation in the availability and quality of the home inspection services offered in different regions of the country. Other issues confronting the industry included differences in certification requirements and procedures across Canada, a lack of portability of certification from one province to another, and the fact that no minimum standards of performance were required to work as a home and property inspector. Moreover, although some of the training materials were shared, there was limited control over the quality of the courses, and in accreditation of the training institutions; and little sector or public recognition for those who had taken the courses. Finally, there was no national code of ethics, and provincial codes varied considerably.

On the public side, provincial/territorial Acts varied in the certification and licensing requirements for Building Officials within their jurisdictions; and municipal building code officials had tried, with limited success, to agree on training standards with DACUMS (an acronym for Developing A Curriculum) at the provincial level.

This inconsistency in standards, qualifications and quality resulted in confusion and a lack of credibility for the industry. An industry survey conducted in 1996 by CMHC showed that there was a desire to have a unified national body to represent both the private inspection industry and public building officials, but as separate entities. As a result, the Canadian Association of Home and Property Inspectors (CAHPI) was formed to represent the existing provincial associations and oversee a uniform national standard of competency for the private home inspection industry. The public building officials already had a national body, the Alliance of Canadian Building Officials Associations (ACBOA) to represent their provincial associations.

In 1999, the Canadian Home Inspectors and Building Officials National Initiative was launched to enhance the credibility and status of the building inspection industry and to harmonize licensing, standards of performance and certification of both private home inspectors and public (municipal) building inspectors across the country. The industry-led initiative began as a partnership effort involving CAHPI and ACBOA.

ACBOA and CAHPI contributed to funding the project, which was also supported by CMHC and the former federal department of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC).

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A steering committee called CHIBO (Canadian Home Inspectors and Building Officials) was established in 2000 with the mandate to conduct occupational analyses and establish minimum National Occupational Standards, a national code of ethics, inspector criteria and consistent performance standards for home and property inspectors and building officials across Canada. CHIBO was comprised of seven representatives from the MBO sector and seven representatives from the HPI sector, as well as a non-voting independent chair and a number of ex-officio members.

Phase One of the Canadian Home Inspectors and Building Officials National Initiative is complete, and resulted in National Occupational Standards (NOS) for the HPI and the MBO sectors which will benefit both consumers and the home inspector and building official professions. The NOS are very detailed, describing the range and depth of skills, knowledge and ability necessary to perform their tasks at a professional level.

The First Nations National Building Officers Association (FNNBOA) was created in 2002 and subsequently joined the initiative after the completion of Phase One. National Occupational Standards for the FNBO were completed in March 2003 by reviewing those developed by the HPI and the MBO, determining the common core competencies, and adapting them to reflect the unique characteristics of the FNBO.

Further information concerning these Occupational Standards are now available on the associations' Web sites, see contact information, below.

Phase Two: Development of Certification and Accreditation Models

In December 2003, the Canadian Home Inspectors and Building Officials National Initiative moved into Phase Two, the development of certification and accreditation models to facilitate the application of the National Occupational Standards across Canada.

The work is being performed in conjunction with the Construction Sector Council (CSC). Created in April 2001, and financed by both government (through the federal department of Human Resources and Skills Development, HRSD) and industry, the Construction Sector Council is a partnership between labour and business in the sector. It is a national organization committed to the development of a highly skilled workforce that will support the current and future needs of the construction industry in Canada.

The Issues

Demographic indicators show that the construction sector is confronting an aging workforce and an inadequate supply of skilled workers. These challenges are compounded by changes to the National Building Code, municipal out-sourcing of services, and recent Supreme Court judgments concerning training inadequacies in the sector. In addition, the Auditor General's report in 2003 stated that federal housing programs need to meet national building codes. These factors are putting pressure on the home and property inspection industry, particularly the MBO and FNBO professions.

A major issue facing the home and property inspection industry, which is national in scope, is the limited degree of labour mobility among jurisdictions. The industry recognizes the need to increase the transferability of skills and the portability of certification. Accessible training programs are needed that reflect and comply with the National Occupational Standards developed in Phase One of the Canadian Home Inspectors and Building Officials National Initiative.

To address these issues, CHIBO has initiated the Certification and Accreditation Models Phase Two project to use the National Occupational Standards from Phase One and to design certification and accreditation models to reflect the national standards for the HPI and MBO sectors. The FNBO are participating on the CHIBO committee, but will be developing their own certification program in parallel with the CHIBO initiative. To conduct the project, which is funded by CHIBO (representing the three sectors of the industry), CMHC and HRSD through the CSC, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in December 2003 between CHIBO-II and the CSC.

Project Structure

The work of the Development of Certification and Accreditation Models Phase Two project will be overseen by an Operating Committee comprised of two CHIBO representatives; two CSC representatives; one FNNBOA representative (ex-officio); one HRDC official (ex-officio); and one CMHC official (ex-officio). The Operating Committee will work in partnership to set objectives and priorities, provide advice on the development of the accreditation and certification models, and provide regular information to the involved parties.

A Working Committee has been struck to develop an accreditation and certification model with reference to the National Occupational Standards. The Working Committee is co-chaired by the CSC and CHIBO. It is comprised of seven Home Inspectors (CAHPI) representatives, seven Building Officials (MBCO) representatives, two First Nations Building Officers (FNNBOA) representatives, one Construction Sector Council representative, one HRSD representative (ex-officio) and one CMHC representative (ex-officio). Additional expertise may be sought by the Working Committee as required.

Project Objectives

The primary objective of the CHIBO Development of Certification and Accreditation Models Phase Two project is to establish certification and accreditation models that will lead to a recognizable and credible inspection industry and also increase worker mobility between jurisdictions. Specifically, the objectives of the project are:

- To conduct a high level comparative analysis of the current curriculum and training materials to determine their future use in the development of courses related to the National Occupational Standards for the HPI, MBO and FNBO sectors;
- To identify training institutions (private and public) which have an affinity for certification training coupled with the capabilities and infrastructure to implement curriculum and training programs in accordance to the National Occupational Standards. It is important to note that this list is not intended to be a comprehensive listing of all delivery agents, but rather to act as a starting point for the industry to determine which types of training institutions have the capabilities and the "appetite" to provide the necessary certification training for each sector;
- To identify and develop a certification model for MBO and HPI sectors (2 models);
- To identify and develop an accreditation model for the MBO and HPI sectors (2 models). The certification and accreditation models will be adapted to suit the needs of the FNBO at a later date;
- To develop an implementation plan for the roll-out of the certification and accreditation models. The implementation process will take place across both the HPI and MBO sectors; and
- To provide a framework or process for the MBO, HPI and FNBO sectors to complete program review of their existing certification programs against the defined tasks in the National Occupational Standards for the HPI, MBO and FNBO sectors.

Project Activities

The Development of Certification and Accreditation Models Phase Two project involves four steps:

- Step 1: Documentation Review, Framework Analysis, and "Gap" Analysis
- Step 2: Design and Development of the Certification Models and Implementation Outlines
- Step 3: Design and Development of the Accreditation Models and Implementation Outlines
- Step 4: Implementation Plan of the Certification and Accreditation Models

Step 1 consists of a documentation review and gap analysis. This process will review existing curriculum and training materials in relation to the National Occupational Standards for the HPI, MBO and FNBO sectors; identify curriculum and training programs that need to be developed to ensure that the National Occupational Standards are met; and identify private and public training institutions that have an affinity for certification training coupled with the capabilities and infrastructure to implement curriculum and training programs in accordance with the National Occupational Standards. It is important to note that this list is not intended to be a comprehensive listing of all delivery agents, but rather to act as a starting point for the industry to determine which types of training institutions have the capabilities and the "appetite" to provide the necessary certification training for each sector. The findings of Step 1 will be presented to the project's Working Committee for feedback, and then to the Operating Committee.

Step 2 involves a review and assessment of certification models as they relate to the National Occupational Standards for the HPI, MBO and FNBO sectors. This step will review the organizational structures that represent HPIs, MBOs, and FNBOs and seek sector input to be used in the development of the certification model for each sector. Criteria for a certification model for the MBO and HPI sectors will then be designed and developed. The certification model will be adapted to meet the needs of the FNBO sector at a later date; this is not part of the present project.

Step 3 involves a review and assessment of accreditation models as they relate to the National Occupational Standards for the HPI, MBO and FNBO sectors. This step will follow the same process as Step Two to develop the accreditation models.

Step 4 includes an implementation plan or blueprint which outlines how each model will be implemented within the corresponding sector (HPI, MBO, and FNBO). The implementation plan is to strictly serve as a guide to help these sectors prepare for implementation.

Next Steps

The Certification and Accreditation Models Phase Two project will take place over an eighteen-month period, with completion and approval of the integrated accreditation and certification models and the implementation plans anticipated by Summer 2005.

Following approval of the certification and accreditation models and the implementation strategy, further work may be required to develop training materials, if gaps exist, to be consistent with the National Occupational Standards and the approved certification and accreditation models. Once the national certification programs and standards of performance are fully adopted and put in place by their respective sectors, the result will be a recognizable and professional home and building inspection industry to better serve the public.

IN THE INTERIM

The National Initiative has made great progress towards establishing national standards for the professional home and building inspection industry. In the interim, CMHC provides useful information on how to find and identify a qualified home inspector (see the *About Your House* fact sheet on *Hiring a Home Inspector* at **www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca**).

Contacts and Further Information

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